Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Beth Ruscio: Two Poems

Beth Ruscio · Wednesday, March 8th, 2017

Beth Ruscio, daughter of actors, is part of a family of artists, actors, writers and vaudevillians. She's a poet, an accomplished actress, and a one-time playwright co-writing *1961 Eldorado* with husband Leon Martell. In 2016, her manuscript *Hollywood Forever Cemetery* won both Honorable Mention for The Two Sylvias Prize, and was a finalist for the Sunken Garden Poetry Prize (Tupelo Press). Her poems have been finalists for Tupelo Quarterly Prize, Ruth Stone Poetry Prize, River Styx Contest, and for Beyond Baroque's Best Poem (2nd place winner). She was honored by the Los Angeles Poetry Festival as Newer Poet, and chosen by Cecilia Woloch for the Patricia Bibby Fellowship to Idyllwild Summer Poetry. Her work has appeared in *California Journal of Poetics*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Cultural Weekly*, *The Malpais Review*, *In Posse Review*, *Spillway*, *speechless-the-magazine* and is anthologized in *Beyond The Lyric Moment; But Who's Counting*; and upcoming in Poet's Calendar; and 1001 Nights.

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Counting Off-Whites On The Fingers of One Hand

Alabaster

Halloween is soon, people sizing up their disguises. Like an inside joke, Trash To Treasures Thrift Store holds an annual sale this time of year on used wedding dresses. A large party of empty gowns hangs, deflated, in an October picture window, not one among them what I'd call a pure white.

Cream

It's my Tuesday custom to walk by that place on the way to the farmer's market. I am soothed by seasonal turnover—silhouette portraits on sale at Groundhog's Day. Next up, Valentine boxer shorts. Strawberries before rhubarb before figs. I know tests for best—the freckliest, teen-fuzziest peaches have the most secret sugar, the lowliest apricots about to turn to mush produce brandy approaching the finest cognac.

Bone

It runs in my family, the love of the shabby genteel, the fostering of underdogs. I married wearing a broken-in vintage frock. Saved, ironed into a precise rectangle, and tucked between layers of acid-free tissue—the second-hand floor length gown with train that my sisters saw me try on and burst into tears: handkerchief cotton batiste, mother-of-pearl buttons sewn like a row of peas all the way down the spine, lace choking up at the throat. Never materialized, the one I saved it for.

Champagne

The lady at Parisian dry cleaners, a bridal gown specialiste, employed mortuary words to assure me that the *eternity keepsake* box in which my dress, propped up on cardboard breasts, was *vacuum-sealed* and came with a lifetime guarantee. Which lifetime, or whose? *The marriage, that's some-zing else,* she said. *Love is more than a late night snack.* I don't wonder. My husband's not one for staying up—oldest son of a French-speaking farmer, he's awake before cows are.

Eggshell

Thin, we called these the blown-out years. Around this time, I went to a dead/undead Halloween costume party as my latest head cold—smeared red lipstick on the rims of my eyes, Vicks VapoRub behind my ears, pinned Kleenex ghosts around the neck of a long black Morticia maxi. For such plainly faked misery, I got a lot of real sympathy. It brought out a faint lime tenderness in the zombie men.

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Late Valentine

O Babe, hear me out.
I mean not to be mean.
Our hokey ark, our true tribe? Yeah.
No me, no you, a loner no more, our.
But, you are not noel, I am not hark.
You're kale to my lamb, I'm llama to your leek,
my bite, your bark, we're like a yurt, leaky, but
normal, a home. I bathe in you, you breathe me.

Not art, maybe, but rhyme, meter,
we are an elaborate labyrinth on the Tiber,
a three minute mile, a Limerick mini-tour.
But beauty, only beauty, and no nite? Abnormal.
Or out our mouths, only the truth? No, honey.
Heartbreak, all heartbreak, all the time.

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